

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

March 8, 2018

The Honorable Greg Walden
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Shimkus
Chairman
Subcommittee on Environment
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Walden and Chairman Shimkus:

We are writing to request that the Committee's Subcommittee on Environment call Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt to testify about the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget proposal and related EPA expenditure issues. Budget hearings have routinely been held by this Subcommittee, and provide an essential opportunity to question EPA leaders about the Agency's priorities and plans. No such hearing was held last year, and no such hearing has yet been scheduled for this year. This lack of accountability, while entirely consistent for Administrator Pruitt, is unacceptable. You have an obligation, and the means, to compel him to appear before the Committee, and we request that you do so.

On February 12, President Trump released a FY 2019 budget that calls for dramatic reductions to EPA funding, including in areas identified as priorities for the Administration. The budget would eliminate important programs to fight lead exposure, prevent pollution, protect beaches, promote recycling, enforce environmental justice requirements, support sound infrastructure at the U.S.-Mexico border, address environmental issues in the Gulf of Mexico, and more. Programs that are not eliminated would be decimated by cuts, including a 46 percent cut to clean air programs from FY 2017 enacted levels, a 48 percent cut to activities targeting leaking underground storage tanks, and a 35 percent cut to chemical safety research. Even infrastructure programs highlighted in the President's infrastructure plan would be severely reduced.

The President is proposing these dramatic cuts threatening the health and environment of all Americans at a time when EPA is mired in a troubling pattern of secrecy and wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars.

Administrator Pruitt has publicly acknowledged lavish and frequent travel, including use of private planes, stays at luxury hotels, and routine domestic travel in first class. He has also acknowledged questionable expenditures on a secure phone booth, biometric security measures, and an extraordinarily large, round-the-clock security detail. According to news reports, Administrator Pruitt even uses private phones to avoid establishing a complete record of his phone conversations.¹ At the same time, the Agency continues to operate with complete disregard for transparency, providing delayed and incomplete responses to Congressional oversight inquiries, taking down Agency websites, and halting certain data collections from polluters.² And it is now clear that political appointees blocking grant awards worth millions of dollars are continuing to engage in outside employment for unnamed clients.

This budget proposal raises serious questions, and the public deserves answers. Yet, the Agency has so far refused to appear before the Committee to discuss the President's budget. For these reasons, we strongly believe that the Committee must hold a hearing with Administrator Pruitt on the FY 2019 budget. Among the pressing questions that should be addressed are:

1. How is the Administration going to launch a "war on lead" while slashing programs that prevent lead exposures?
2. How will drastic enforcement cuts affect the already alarming drop in enforcement by the EPA since Administrator Pruitt joined the Agency?
3. How will severe cuts in grants to states support "cooperative federalism?" How have those cuts been influenced by John Konkus, Deputy Associate Administrator for the Office of Public Affairs, or other political appointees currently engaged in outside work for unnamed clients?
4. How will this budget support the rapidly increasing number of open records lawsuits against the Agency?
5. How would the proposal to transform EnergyStar into a fee program limit participation and affect consumers?

¹ *EPA and National Archives Sued Over Scott Pruitt's Record-Keeping Habits*, Government Executive (Feb. 23, 2018).

² *Scott Pruitt is Carrying Out His E.P.A. Agenda in Secret, Critics Say*, New York Times (Aug. 11, 2017).

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Budget hearings are important opportunities for members of our Committee to understand proposed budgetary changes at a particular agency, while questioning senior officials about why certain programs are being cut, canceled or consolidated. We strongly urge you to take the necessary steps to convene a hearing with EPA Administrator Pruitt on his agency's budget as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank Pallone Jr." in a cursive style.

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul D. Tonko" in a cursive style.

Paul D. Tonko
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment